TheVillage

www.thevillage.co

Issue #233 April 2023

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

OUR PLAN
FOR BROMSGROVE'S VILLAGES

1 Keeping rural areas connected and protected

We are committed to keeping our rural areas connected and protected. While broadband connectivity has improved, we will continue to address any gaps in provision and work with providers to improve mobile signal reception. We will also work closely with partners to tackle cross-border crime.

2 Connecting communities young and old

We believe in building strong communities that support both young and old. We will continue to invest in youth provision across the district, as well as enabling dementia care cafes and other services to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Our use of the world-leading 'Asset-based Community

3 Backing our creative sector and The

We are proud to have secured over £600,000 investment for The Artrix. Working closely with the Holding Trust, we will develop a clear business case to enhance and secure our creative sector offer across the district.

4 Upgrading our transport and tackling traffic

Through engaging with Worcestershire County Council, we have commissioned a strategic transport assessment for Bromsgrove and beyond. Our upgrades to the A38 will improve congestion and traffic flow, while our Demand Responsive buses have already started and will be expanded. We have restored bus services to the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham, now including Sunday running.

5 Improving our town centres and high streets

Following the appointment of a dedicated town centres manager, we have adopted a strategy for our eight commercial centres across the district. Our investment of over £16 million in regenerating Bromsgrove Town Centre will act as a catalyst for inward investment and job creation.

6 Making our area cleaner and greener

Our efforts include tackling fly-tipping and prosecuting the worst offenders. We will also deliver more electric car charging points across the district and examine opportunities around hydrogen.

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Bromsgrove Conservatives

TheVillage Issue 233 April 2023

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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Independents Ready
Page 8

Watching over Cofton
Page 13

Hog Highway Heroes
Page 33

Planting the Seeds
Pages 39-43

Rambling in a Circle
Page 54

Front cover: A goldfinch resting on a bird feeder taken by Village reader Dennis Brown, of Hopwood. See the Anonymous Birder, Page 32

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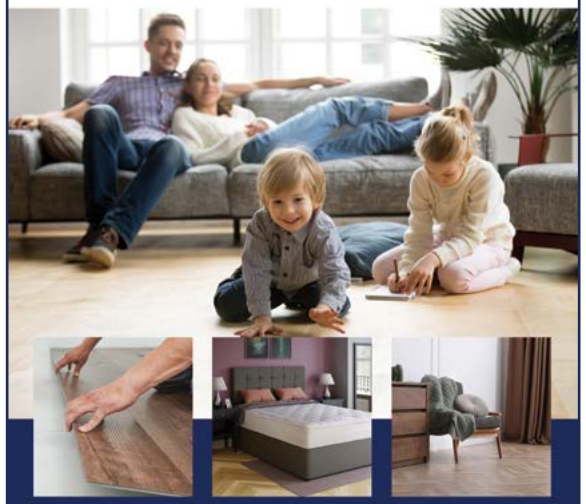

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ROADWORK NIGHTMARES

FRUSTRATION is boiling over across *The Village* area as residents find themselves living amid traffic and roadworks nightmares.

The main concern is over the A441 Birmingham Road running through Hopwood at one end and Bordesley at the other.

The roadworks trauma suffered by Bordesley villagers over the past year, on top of the constant heavy traffic past their homes for decades, has now been topped by the M42 effectively being diverted through their village while the motorway is closed at night.

The Bordesley Matters residents group says they were not consulted about this and that Worcestershire County Council "saw fit to do so without thinking about the consequences to its residents".

These include "causing residents sleepless nights and stress regarding the vibrations affecting their houses".

On the other side of Alvechurch, the plight of Hopwood residents, where roadworks and the consequent lack of highway maintenance have caused problems for months, was highlighted by one villager who pleaded for help to Alvechurch Parish Council. Gill Lungley told councillors that one section of pavement was so swamped in leaf mould that "it isn't a pavement, it is a woodland walk".

She said the flooding it caused meant a puddle had spread right across the road. "I have to use an orange flag and wave it as I walk into the road to go around it," she added.

BORDESLEY has a new village 'gateway' (above), installed after the first attempt (below) was likened to 'half of a child's cot' by an Alvechurch parish councillor.

"I should not be in the position where I either drown or get knocked down by a car."

Gill hoped the parish council could put pressure on the county council to sort out these problems at its north-easterly border, pointing out that the pavement a few hundred yards north were marvellous, because it was in Birmingham.

Coun Steve Hornsby sympathised, saying: "It is clear that the county council highways department is only interested in what has four wheels and not two legs."

Parish chairman Marc Worrall said: "We need to get hold of [county councillor] Aled Luckman and ask him to do something about it, even if it is from afar." He explained: "Our county councillor has gone a bit AWOL at the moment."

Redditch Matters is appealing for a council tax rebate from the county council to compensate for the "serious lack of duty of care" to villagers.

District councillor Annette English told *The Village* she agrees "wholeheartedly that this situation is intolerable and that residents deserve recompense". She is seeking an urgent response from officers.

VICTOR Buzderewicz celebrates his 100th birthday with Lesley Lane, of Windmill Hill Care, who helps to look after him.

Victor was a Staff Sergeant in the Polish Corp of the British 8th Army and was seriously wounded in the battle for Monte Cassino in 1944.

He lived to tell the tale and to marry wife Mary 72 years ago. The couple have lived in *The Village* area for more than 40 years.

Jackie Grant, the proprietor of Barnt Green-based Windmill Care, said: "What a privilege it is to support them both. They had a wonderful day and were visited by friends and neighbours.

"Happy birthday, Victor!"

Food festival forging ahead

BARNT GREEN parish councillors have agreed to go ahead with the proposed Music and Street Food Festival in September.

It is now to be wholly managed by a company called Social Eats, and held at Bittell Road playing fields.

There will be different street food vendors, children's entertainment and a tribute band and the event will run from noon until 10pm.

A firm date had still to be decided, but it is very likely to be Saturday September 16.

■ Worcestershire County Council has confirmed to Barnt Green Parish Council that the state of the pavement on Hewell Lane has been assessed and improvement work will begin in 2023 or 2024.

Larder readies to double sessions

ALVECHURCH Community Larder is planning to run two sessions a week from June 1.

The new session will be on Thursdays from 6.30-8pm while the Friday session will continue from 11am-12.30pm.

"This will allow us to offer our service to individuals and families who are in full-time work who either want to help to reduce food waste or who may be struggling with the cost of living or, of course, both," said a spokesman.

It would take time to set up the extra session because they would need to increase food collections and storage "neither of which we can do quickly".

He added: "Most importantly we need to recruit more volunteers."

Any potential new volunteers should contact Roger Wardle at: rogerwardle331@gmail.com or on 07917404878.

Villagers can donate each week at the Baptist Church on Thursdays between 10am and noon or in the baskets outside the library or in the dentist. "Seventy per cent of all food waste is in our kitchen cupboards, so please check and donate rather than throw away," said the spokesman.

Scrambling for some answers

LICKEY COMMUNITY Group has approached Worcestershire Regulatory Services and Bromsgrove District Council after reports of motorcycle scrambling over Marlbrook Tip, *writes Keith Woolford*.

A scrambling track can be seen (above) from the road to have been formed over the site and comes within yards of the balancing pond designated a "reservoir" (above) by the Environment Agency.

The "reservoir" was deemed so sensitive by the agency that a report on the site was once redacted so heavily to be pointless because of "potential damage or disruption to the national infrastructure by acts of sabotage".

The community group will be bringing members and guests up to date with the latest news at its annual meeting, starting at 7.30pm on Monday 24 April at Lickey Trinity Centre.

Cafe decking plea

THE chairman of Alvechurch Parish Council has urged district planning and conservation officers to ensure new steps and decking outside the former village post office stick to the planning permission granted.

The developers of a proposed cafe in the building have rebuilt the steps and ramp (above, right) after a first attempt was deemed unacceptable.

Coun Marc Worrall told councillors: "Clearly that decking area is going to encourage chairs to be put out and we have got residents there who will be affected.

"Just because it is an improvement, I don't want officers rolling over – because it is an improvement on what was dreadful."

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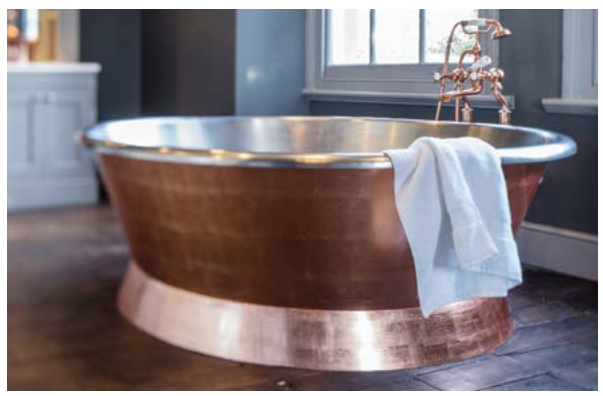

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Independents ready

Here we go again – it's local election time, when all of the seats on Bromsgrove District Council are up for grabs. It's shaping up to be even closer than four years ago, if that is possible – in 2019 a handful of votes kept the Conservative group in control of this area as the emergence of independent candidates changed the political landscape.

Independents won seats in a large swathe of *The Village* area, from Hopwood and Barnt Green, right down through Alvechurch Village and Alvechurch South wards, taking in villages such as Rowney Green and Beoley.

It was almost a clean sweep through Cofton Hackett, too, where the long-established Tory councillor only held off an independent challenge by 14 votes.

With the Conservatives faring poorly in the polls nationally, as voters are repelled by "Partygate" and Liz Truss's tenure as Prime Minister, it remains to be seen if this translates to the local ballot boxes.

Nominations for candidates don't close until April 4, but three independents have already thrown their hats into the ring (see right), including Charlie Hotham, who set the independent hare running by winning Barnt Green and Hopwood in 2015.

Below, two independents who won in 2019, but are now standing down, explain why they believe it is still vital to vote for independent candidates.

Charlie Hotham, Barnt Green and Hopwood:
As an independent, I am able to fully represent the view of residents, putting people before politics – achieving far more than those who find themselves silenced by party loyalty.

I am deeply concerned over what the outcome of the long-awaited district-wide Green Belt and district plan review might be proposing.

Rest assured, if elected I will be fighting to protect the ward from unwelcome development while understanding the need for more affordable homes.

Alan Bailes, Alvechurch South:
I have lived in the area for 35 years and been actively involved in local issues.
I care passionately about what goes on in the area and have a proven track record of serving our community. I will be working to:
✓ Protect the Green Belt
✓ Promote better public involvement with local issues
✓ Provide better public transport
✓ Create a better environment for the residents in Alvechurch South

Rachael Bailes, Alvechurch Village:
I am not affiliated to any political party and would always vote in a way that keeps my integrity to be truly independent and not have to follow any party rules or policies.

As an Alvechurch parish councillor, I have learned a lot about how district and county councils operate.

I care about this fantastic environment and want to make sure that Alvechurch and the surrounding area gets on the Bromsgrove District Council agenda and gets its fair share.

It's been a privilege representing our villages

Kate Van Der Plank, Alvechurch Village: It's been a pleasure and a privilege to represent Alvechurch at Bromsgrove but I'm moving on to new adventures so I'm not standing for re-election.

I hope Alvechurch and surrounding wards continue in the independent tradition and I am delighted there are really strong, local independent candidates standing. You might think your vote doesn't make a difference but the current ruling group won their majority with just 24 votes. Please use your vote wisely on 4 May.

Annette English, Alvechurch South:
A huge thank you to everyone who voted for me four years ago – it's been a great privilege to represent all the residents in Alvechurch South Ward.

I've met some great people and because I'm an independent councillor I've been able to vote at council meetings in a way that benefits residents rather than having to follow a party line. I am fully behind the independent candidate for Alvechurch South as I know he will work hard for you all.

Good luck Alan!

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SCHOOL TRAFFIC FEARS

THE SPEED of traffic near a village school is under investigation after parents raised concerns with school governors and staff.

The chairman of governors at Alvechurch Crown Meadow First School & Nursery, Keith Wiseman, has now written to all parents to assure them the school is trying to tackle the problems.

He said the main areas of concern centred on one of the the crossings (pictured above) and with the speed of cars entering the school gates from the roundabout.

Mr Wiseman said he had met police and county highway officers on-site and despite having close to 800 pupils arriving and leaving each day, the schools were unlikely to qualify for a pelican crossing.

But police had urged parents to show more vigilance while using the zebra crossings.

After raising the matter with Alvechurch Parish Council, chairman Marc Worrall said it would be discussed in April. "Hopefully we will endorse this and can weigh in to help at full strength," he added.

The Garrity's First Birthday Bash

Over the past year, it's become a go-to spot for locals and tourists thanks to its cosy ambiance, food, drink, and friendly staff and The Garrity in Barnt Green is excited to celebrate a whole year of trading on Saturday 15th April.

To mark this momentous occasion, they're hosting a night of pizza, craft beer, and gin pairings. Starting at 6pm, visitors can enjoy a feast of pizzas from the popular Cofton Pizza as well as palatable gin and tonic pairings.

"Celebrating our one-year anniversary with the team and the community is a huge achievement," says co-proprietor, Al Smith.

"It's been quite a year, where no two days are ever the same, and we are grateful for the overwhelming support we've received. We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been a part of the journey so far."

To top off their first year, The Garrity has been named a finalist in the

2023 Midlands Start Up Awards – a collaboration with the team behind the Great British Entrepreneur Awards –celebrating the achievements of individuals who have turned ideas into opportunities and taken the risk to launch a new product or service.

The Garrity has a balanced brunch menu with evening nibbles and is partnered with Midland-based coffee roasters 200 Degrees, as well as Brighton-based indie tea brand Bird and Blend.

There is also a range of cocktails, craft beers and wines.

The Garrity is here for the good times!

■ For more information on our events, including details of the new monthly quiz, visit: www.thegarrity.co.uk/events

Cofton Hackett Parish Council

Parish Council News: Spring 2023

Elections

THE LOCAL Parish Council elections are being held on 4th May. It would be good to see some new faces coming forward to join Cofton Hackett Parish Council so that we fully represent the views and concerns of our residents.

The closing date for nominations is 4th April, so if you are interested in becoming a Councillor and finding out more about the Parish Council's work, please contact our clerk Andrew Billau or talk to one of your Councillors for more information.

AFTER 11 years as a Parish Councillor, the last five as chairman, I have taken the decision to stand down from Cofton Hackett Parish Council and will not be putting my name forward as a candidate at the elections in May.

It has been an honour to serve as a Parish Councillor and I look back with pride at what the Parish Council has achieved over the last decade.

Cllr Roger Westbury, Chairman

See *Village Views*, Page 22-23

Traffic Safety Meeting

On Thursday 23rd February a public meeting was held to discuss Traffic Safety in Cofton Hackett with residents becoming increasingly concerned about the speed of traffic on our roads, inconsiderate and dangerous driving, and the apparent lack of enforcement by police. We were pleased to see more than 80 residents from the Parish in attendance.

At the meeting were:

- John Campion, Police and Crime Commissioner
- Cllr Adrian Kriss, County Councillor, Worcestershire County Council
- Richard Cenci, Highways Liaison Officer, Worcestershire County Council
- PC Marc Ginder, Hagley and Rubery Safer Neighbourhood Team
- Cllr Roger Westbury, Chair, Cofton Hackett Parish Council
- Cllr Nick Banyard, Cofton Hackett Parish Council
- Members of Cofton Hackett Parish Council and neighbouring Parish Councils

Cllrs Westbury and Banyard spoke about the increasing level of concern for traffic safety in Cofton Hackett, speeding on our major roads, residents finding it difficult to emerge from driveways and side roads, incidents of dangerous driving and the ineffective pedestrian crossing on Groveley Lane into Cofton Park. There is a lack of response to requests for speed and mobile cameras and an apparent lack of Police response to requests to address these concerns.

John Campion, Cllr Adrian Kriss, Richard Cenci and PC Marc Ginder all contributed to how Worcestershire Highways and the Police can assist in mitigating some of the problems we face, working closely with the Parish Council.

Vehicle activated speed signs, Community Speedwatch and additional parking restrictions were discussed. The Parish Council is prepared to commit funds towards implementing measures which will help reduce speeds. Cllr Kriss promised to issue a survey to residents of Ten Ashes Lane and Lickey Coppice to ascertain their views on the possible closure or access restriction of Ten Ashes Lane.

There were several questions and comments from residents, including regarding the pedestrian crossing near East Works Drive, inconsiderate parking, traffic speeds at Rose Hill island and the possibility of introducing speed bumps and other traffic slowing measures. A full report of the meeting is available on our website: www.coftonhackettpc.org.

Annual Parish Assembly

The Annual Parish Assembly will be held on Wednesday 17th May at Cofton Village Hall. This is not a normal Parish Council Meeting but is an opportunity for members of the public to hear what the Parish Council and other bodies have been involved with through the past year. It is also an opportunity for residents to raise any issues with the Parish Council. We'd love to see as many people there as possible.

Council Meetings

The Parish Council meets on the third Monday of every month (excluding August) at the New Village Hall. Members of the public are welcome to attend all meetings to raise any important issues or just to see what's happening in the Parish.

Contact the Clerk

Email:
clerk@coftonhackettparishcouncil.gov.uk
Telephone: 07496 979153

Any views and opinions on this page are those of Cofton Hackett Parish Council.

WATCHING OVER COFTON

Keith Duncan and John Pierpoint tell *The Village* how their plans for the Cofton Hackett community are rejuvenating the long-running Neighbourhood Watch scheme to help keep their streets safe.

NEIGHBOURHOOD Watch has existed in Cofton Hackett since the early 1980s. The scheme was revamped in the early 2000s due to the increased anti-social behaviour in Cofton Park.

A sub-committee was set up, and for a time, coordinators were designated for each road in the area, attempting to only have responsibility for a small number of houses. It was seen by other Neighbourhood Watch groups as very successful, forging strong working relationships with the local police and other agencies and dramatically reducing crime.

In its heyday, more than 800 households were part of the scheme. Crime levels reduced further with the introduction of "Smartwater". However, as time has progressed, people have left the scheme or have left the area.

The new development in Cofton has added substantial new areas to cover. Yet very few new coordinators have come forward to fill the gaps. So it is no longer possible to continue as we have done before.

Cofton Hackett Neighbourhood Watch has to change to adapt to changing times and we offer our grateful thanks to the sub-committee, particularly the secretary and all the coordinators present and past.

An active group has been meeting over the last year to discuss how we move forward to ensure our residents have access to Neighbourhood Watch information on a continual basis.

We have trialed the "Ourwatch" National Neighbourhood Watch scheme, which is the way our local police force prefers residents to receive alerts (in fact, a group can no longer call itself "Neighbourhood Watch" unless it belongs to this scheme).

We have no option but to move with the times. It is not as personal as our scheme has been but we have found that it works, providing access to alerts and other information from the police.

We now encourage all our residents to join the Ourwatch system.

GET INVOLVED NOW

The new scheme relies on residents contacting the Police by telephoning 101 or 999 for any incident/alert and obtaining an incident number. If the police are not informed, no alert will be generated.

To join Ourwatch and receive these alerts, visit: **www.ourwatch.org.uk**. Click "Join Us" on the top bar of the website then follow the steps in the online form.

You will receive an email with a verification passcode that needs to be entered into the form. Then enter your address, select which messages you'd like to receive and choose to join "Cofton Hackett NW" from the offered list of schemes. Keep an eye on your mailbox for future messages from the scheme.

If you require a full, step-by-step guide to joining Ourwatch, please contact: alerts@chnw.co.uk.

If you need help setting up your account, or don't have access to the internet or an email account, we suggest contacting a friend or neighbour for help.

For further information about the scheme or details on how to sign up, please contact:
Keith Duncan 0121 445 2607
John Pierpoint 0121 445 2799

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

End of an era: St Andrew's students with the beloved, but ageing ship.

A VILLAGE school is enlisting the help of the circus to raise the funds needed to buy new playground equipment for its pupils.

St Andrews CE Primary School, Barnt Green, has a well-loved pirate ship in the school playground, which has been greatly enjoyed by children for more than 15 years. The ship has also been diligently repaired by the caretaker, Mr Botfield many times since then, after the wear and tear of daily play.

However, *The Village* was told that the ship is reaching a stage where it it cannot continue to be repaired or spruced up by yet another coat of paint.

St Andrew's PTA, who have previously raised money for a new school library and a running track around the school field, are now turning their attention to fundraising to replace the ship with new play equipment. So far, they have raised £2,739, mostly from the school's Christmas Fayre and a "Beer and bubbles" event.

Francesca Barnes, Headteacher at St Andrews, told *The Village* about the school's plans for the new play area. Companies will be visiting the school, to speak to some of the children about different options which could replace the ship, and to inspire them to design some ideas of their own, about what they would like in their playground.

The best student ideas will then be taken to help shape the new playground equipment, which they hope will last for many years.

This summer, as part of the school's annual summer event, the PTA have arranged for the National Festival Circus to visit on Saturday 1 July, and a portion of the money raised from the event will go towards the playground, to provide new equipment for young children to enjoy. An Easter disco and other fundraising events are also planned to help raise funds.

Tickets to the circus will cost £8.50 per person. For more information about the circus, and ticket sales, please visit: tkt.to/circus

LIVING THE LIFE YOU CHOOSE

"Mum is much happier since her move here"

Families praise the outstanding care experience their loved ones receive at new luxury care home Cofton Park Manor.

SITUATED in an idyllic location, with spectacular views, Cofton Park Manor is a luxurious and welcoming care home offering residential, dementia, and nursing care, as well as short breaks.

Since opening at the start of the year, the luxury care home now enjoys a thriving community, and benefits from an in-house wellbeing and beauty salon, a lively café where residents and families spend time together over a slice of homemade cake, and a private dining suite for family celebrations and events.

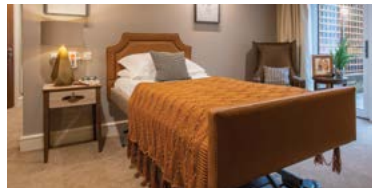
Variety is the spice of life, and at Cofton Park Manor the resident chef ensures that they serve a wide range of meals catering for every taste and diet.

The carefully planned menus offer well balanced wholesome meals, where traditional dishes feature alongside international cuisine and include varied seasonal options, every day of the week.

Aside from its unrivalled environment and exceptional care, what really sets Cofton Park Manor apart is its dedication to ensuring that people can live the life they choose.

The warm and caring staff – known as Homemakers – encourage and support everyone, going out of their way to help people to embrace and enjoy life. Whether that's organising a special event in the private dining room, exploring the community, or sitting down to watch a classic film in comfort in the cinema, Cofton Park Manor is a wonderful place to call home.

More than just a place to live: Outstanding facilities, care and community life, our residents thrive in their new home.



Relaxing spaces: Rooms that your family can call home.

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To learn more about life at Cofton Park Manor, tour the luxury care home, which includes spacious suites and en-suite bedrooms, and meet the team, members of the local community are invited to drop in to enjoy a coffee in their elegant café.

'It was my Dad's birthday very soon after he moved in, and we used the private dining room for 11 of us to have a get-together which was great. The team did everything possible to make the evening special for him.'

Daughter of a Cofton Park Manor Resident

'My mother came to Cofton Park Manor for a short break and quickly decided it was the right place for her. Surroundings are first-class, staff are caring and good-humoured and communication with the home is easy and open. Mum is much happier since her move here. We are relieved that she has settled so well.'

Daughter of a Cofton Park Manor Resident

To book a visit, or to learn more about care at Cofton Park Manor, please get in touch with Matt Brown, Regional Community Relations Lead on 01213 872722 or Matt.Brown@hamberleycarehomes.co.uk. Cofton Park Manor | 466 Lickey Road | Cofton Hackett | B45 8UU

Rita's £3,000 charity crop

RITA Coe, a 63 year old mother of two and grandmother of four, from Blackwell, is raising money for Brain Tumour Support, a cause very close to her heart.

In 2009, Rita was diagnosed with a slow growing acoustic neuroma (a tumour in her brain), for which she received specialist radiotherapy treatment. The treatment worked to stabilise her tumour and for 13 years the tumour stopped growing and remained under control.

In 2022, Rita had an MRI scan following some symptoms and a very busy year, and it was discovered that the tumour - which had been nearly forgotten about for many years had grown significantly, and Rita - had also developed hydrocephalus (a build-up of cerebral fluid in and around the brain). The only option was invasive surgery to remove the growth.

'Before the cut': Rita is determined to help others.

Although Rita's tumour is a low grade, benign tumour, she has been advised that she will lose her hearing on one side and may face further surgery in future. Rita said: "The prospect of surgery is scary, and the number of risks are alarming, however I'm trying to maintain a positive mental attitude, and I am thinking of others suffering with more serious tumours".

In addition to her own experience with brain tumours, Rita is close with families who have lost loved ones to brain tumours and she wants to help Brain Tumour Support to continue their work helping families face the devastating impact of a brain tumour diagnosis.

Rita is expecting to have her surgery within weeks and is determined to bring something positive out of her experience. Before her operation, she will be required to have her head shaved at the incision site.

However, Rita has decided to have an "extreme haircut" to raise money for Brain Tumour Support. Rita's hairdresser agreed to this, and by the time you read *The Village*, Rita's head will have been shaved, for which she has received donations to her sponsorship page, which currently stands at more than £3,000.

For more information, you can find Rita's sponsorship page at: www.justgiving.com/page/rita-coe-1677363281253

SPECIALIST CARE IN YOUR OWN HOME

WHEN you need to consider full-time care, you may think that your only choice is to uproot your life, and move into a care home. This is not the case. There is another option; Live-in care from a company like Promedica24.

As the name suggests, live-in care involves a specialist care provider moving into your home full time. They offer 24-hour support, tailored to your particular needs.

A live-in carer will typically help with domestic tasks, personal care, shopping and managing your medication.

Many people draw comfort from their home and would ideally prefer to stay in familiar surroundings with a lifetime of personal effects and memories.

A live-in carer allows you to stay in the place you know best, with an expert there for support.

Although it may not be possible to live alone any longer, your carer is there to help navigate any risks of living alone, while maintaining your sense of independence and preventing loneliness.

As Europe's largest provider of live-in care services, Promedica24 has achieved a 9.9 rating on Homecare.co.uk and is fully regulated by the Care Quality Commission.

The company has also been shortlisted for three Great British Care Awards, in recognition of: their outstanding response to the Covid-19 pandemic, their live-in care expertise, and their efforts in staff training and retention.

"As a Registered Nurse with over 20 years of experience, I feel passionately about facilitating the independence and protecting the wellbeing of the people I care for.

For many people, the best care choice could be to receive support at home and I look forward to working with the local community to find the right care solutions for their families."

Cathy Rice, West Midlands Regional Partner

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CYCLING LADIES CLUB TOGETHER

MEMBERS of Hopwood Ladies Cycling Club spent last year raising more than £3,000 for two charities; Marie Curie and PAPYRUS.

The group, which has been going for more than 15 years, has a very full calendar of bicycle rides, including weekly outings and longer rides to the coast.

They usually ride to a cafe, for a drink and a catch-up, before cycling home again, and now often have a group so large it can be a struggle finding a cafe to take them all!

Last year, the club decided to use their long summer ride to raise money for two charities, chosen to support a member of the club who lost her husband to cancer and her son to suicide in 2021.

The sponsored ride, from Henley in Arden to Weymouth, totalled 153 miles and 19 women took part. "It's amazing how tough some of these ladies are," said Anne Johnson, the club's charity coordinator.

Mission accomplished: The Cycling Club upon arriving in Weymouth, and ready to celebrate.

All 19 women completed the ride, and celebrated by going in the sea when they arrived in Weymouth.

The club held additional competitions and events, including a competition titled "Guess how many socks, clean or dirty, were found under the bed of the teenage son of our Chairlady" (a very shocking result!), and two well-attended skittles nights.

In total, the club raised £3,050, which was split equally between Marie Curie and PAPYRUS. Anne said: "We know that these funds will help Marie Curie provide expert care, guidance and support to help people with a terminal illness, and their families, and get the most from the time they have left.

"The money we have raised for PAPYRUS will help run a confidential helpline service, HOPELINEUK, which offers practical confidential suicide prevention help and advice and support to young people who are struggling with life."

From small Acorns grows a great shop

BARNT GREEN'S only charity shop, Acorns, has doubled in size and presence with the opening of another store just next door.

Acorns Children's Hospice provides specialist palliative care for over 700 life-limited and life-threatened children every year and support for nearly 1,000 families. Most of the costs needed by Acorns to carry out their important work is raised by fundraising and donations.

The original store is now dedicated to children's clothes, games and toys, with the new store, easily identified by its bright blue awning, bursting with women's and men's clothes, shoes and homeware.

The new stores were celebrated with a community open day including a ceremonial ribbon cutting to officially open the stores.

The grand opening: Anna Ingram and Karen Jones (above, centre) and Acorns volunteers cut the ribbon to open the new and improved boutiques.

Anna Ingram and Karen Jones, Community Shop Managers at Acorn Barnt Green, said: "We're thrilled to be able to unveil our bigger, better Barnt Green shop and share this exciting expansion with the local community.

"We're proud to be a part of this community, which in return has shown us nothing but love and support for more than ten years.

"This exciting new chapter for our shop is as much for them as it is for us – we wouldn't be here without them and we certainly wouldn't be able to expand our shop. Nor would we be here without the commitment and support of our amazing team of volunteers, all of whom live locally.

"So, a huge thank you to everyone in Barnt Green for really taking our shop and our cause into their hearts!"

20 From The Village archive Years Ago

THE COVER of the April 2003 issue of *The Village*, displays a Spring Narcissus, taken by local photographer Jo Cound, whose popular photography workshops were also being advertised in the magazine in Spring 2003.

HELEN'S MEXICAN ODYSSEY

When Helen Higginson, of Barnt Green, first heard about Acorns Children's Hospice, she thought of her own four, healthy grandsons and wanted to help less fortunate youngsters. Helen became a volunteer receptionist at the Acorns Hospice in Selly Oak, and it wasn't long before one particular fundraising opportunity caught her eye "Bike Mexico with Chris Boardman", ex-Olympic Champion.

Helen and her husband Stan decided to sign up to the trip, although due to a minor heart condition Stan had to reluctantly withdraw from the expedition. The couple's daughter, Carol stepped into Stan's cycling shoes and both Carol and Helen began training for the 310 mile ride over six days.

They flew to Cancun, and then caught a coach to Merida, before beginning the ride, which started with a police escort for 10km, before riding through the Yucatan countryside. After five more days they ended their ride at the Caribbean Sea. Helen and the group raised over £7,000 through sponsorship and donations, and made some fantastic memories .

BEST FEET FORWARD AT 50

Ian Hayes looked back on the 50 year history of the Arrow Valley Countryside Group, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary.

The group was established in 1953, when a number of Youth Hostel Association members resident in Alvechurch tried to re-establish the society as the North East Worcestershire Local Group of the YHA. After many years, social evenings, cycling and rambling, but few stays in hostels, they decided to secede from the YHA and became the Arrow Valley Countryside Group.

10 From The Village archive Years Ago

A SWAN glides across the pool at Paper Mill, Redditch on the cover of our April 2013 issue, taken by Paul Wilde, who reported the sad news that one of the swans, the pen, had died. Jan Harrigan, founder of Wychbold Swan Rescue, which cares for injured and sick water birds, said they couldn't be sure of the cause of death at the time, but litter and dog attacks were responsible for many injuries and fatalities every year.

25 YEARS OF FUNDRAISING

The Bromsgrove branch of Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research was gearing up for its 25th annual fun run.

The charity, which had raised hundreds of thousands of pounds, planned to host the event at Bromsgrove Rugby Club in Finstall, and was hoping to attract runners of all ages. The Bromsgrove branch had, at the time, raised £800,000 since it was founded in 1988.

Nicole Harris (above, with Bromsgrove-born actor Mark Williams), whose young son Marc had just been diagnosed with leukaemia, was one of those who responded to an initial appeal for help with fundraising, which led to the branch being formed.

Marc died the following year, aged just nine years old and Nicole was determined to raise as much money as possible so that other families might not have to lose loved ones in the same way. Nicole became the branch chairman in 1989 and the first fun run took place that year, and has expanded over the years.

MEAT THE WINNERS

You might remember last month we looked back at a win for Paul Queen's sausages in March 2003. Ten years later, village butchers Paul (left) and Steve Read show off their gold award-winning produce.

Paul of EJ Crow & Son, Alvechurch, won golds for his traditional pork sausage and home-cured bacon, while Steve, of Meadow Farm, Barnt Green, won gold for his pork pies and silver for his sausages.

Focus on cameras

Dear Editor – I write in response to the letter from Mike Betts in last month's edition of *The Village* magazine headed "Shame the motorists".

I totally agree the 20mph speed limit in Alvechurch village centre is ineffective. However, I cannot agree with Mike's proposed solution of trying to embarrass motorists with a large digital sign that displays the number of motorists who exceed the 20mph speed limit each day.

The selfish majority will not be deterred by mere notices, they would treat them with the same contempt they do the 20mph notices themselves.

The only thing they will respond to is if their breaking the law results in heavy fines or having their licence taken away. Speed cameras situated in the 30mph zones to the north and south of Alvechurch and the 20mph zone in the village centre would solve the "rat race" problem we suffer in just a few weeks.

Unfortunately, residents believe the politicians, who are afraid of upsetting car owning voters, and highways engineers sitting in their ivory tower in county hall, when they claim they are not allowed to install speed cameras.

This is just not true. Plenty of authorities do so. It just requires the inclination.

If speed cameras were installed in Alvechurch, they could be self financing. Even if they weren't, with local authorities extorting more than £10 million each and every year from Alvechurch council taxpayers, it is about time some of this money was spent to the benefit and safety of the community.

Howard Allen, Alvechurch

Fond farewell

Dear Editor – After 11 years as a parish councillor, the last five as chairman, I have taken the decision to stand down from Cofton Hackett Parish Council and will not be putting my name forward as a candidate at the elections in May.

It has been an honour to serve as a parish councillor and I look back with pride at what the parish council has achieved over the past decade. Principal to these achievements has been working with St Modwen to oversee the construction of some 600 new homes on the former Austin Rover East Works site and the welcoming of more than 1,000 new residents to the parish.

A key factor in the assimilation of these new residents has been the handing over of the new Cofton Village Hall which has provided a welcome social and leisure facility for both new and existing residents.

This provides a focal point for the community and a well used venue for celebratory events illustrated by last year's Queen's Jubilee party and two highly successful Christmas fayres

The new village hall was a condition of Section 106 of the planning agreement for the new development which also gave the parish council an amount of money to spend on improvements to the open spaces around Cofton Hackett.

To date this has seen new equipment installed on the Myhill Field play area, new benches provided around the parish, new planters sited at strategic points and hundreds of bulbs planted along the roadsides.

The parish council is currently working on the provision of new allotment plots on the land at the rear of Oakfield Drive and The Grove.

Another major achievement has been the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Cofton Hackett and our adjoining parish of Lickey and Blackwell.

The two parish councils worked closely together to produce a plan for the next ten years which has been accepted as a reference document by Bromsgrove District Council.

This not only lays down guidelines for what our residents would like to see on the further development of our two parishes, but also acts as a snapshot of life in Cofton Hackett and Lickey and Blackwell in the early 21st century.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their hard work and support over the last 11 years and I wish them and all Cofton Hackett residents the very best for the years ahead.

I shall be following the further development of the parish with a keen eye.

Coun Roger Westbury
Cofton Hackett

Relentless encroachment

Dear Editor – As highlighted on page 5 of the March issue of *The Village*, this north-east corner of Worcestershire has good cause to fear for its future under our planning laws as they stand and even more so because of the way they are applied.

Those who have experience of "planning matters" know that objectors never win and wealthy developers always do.

This area is much sought-after by entrepreneurs seeking to cash in on those fleeing our towns and cities in search of a more acceptable environment for themselves and their young families.

Meanwhile, the relentless encroachment of Bordesley in the direction of Alvechurch village indicates quite clearly that we can't rely on our county or district councils to protect us and our green spaces.

Peter McHugh
Alvechurch

Who is the Poo Panther?

Dear Editor – I know there have long been issues with dog poo in Alvechurch, but I am astounded that no one has been caught in the act yet (or are people too anxious to confront the messers?).

Whose dog/s are being allowed to poo on people's drives, lawns and on the public footpaths, and can anything be done?

Or are the rest of us just expected to clean up after the inconsiderate Poo Panthers who allow them to mess everywhere?

Kicking up a stink
Alvechurch

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Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is April 10th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Grace Jones, of Alvechurch, a pupil at Crown Meadow First School, shows off the Mini Vinny she won in March's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on April 6 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

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PUTTING WOMEN FIRST

Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs introduce VHK, and how their clinic delivers a holistic approach to women's healthcare.

Supporting with care: Dr Heidi Kerr (left) and Dr Vicky Hobbs (right) are here to provide support and care for all aspects of women's health.

VHK Women's Health Clinic, was founded in Bromsgrove in 2022 by Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs. Their idea of opening a clinic to specialise in women's health was formed following almost 40 years' combined experience as GPs, and a shared interest in women's health.

The pair first successfully developed an education company, teaching GP trainees and fellow doctor and nursing colleagues about women's health. They told *The Village*: "We supported corporate organisations in raising awareness of employee health issues, our audiences and friends started to ask: '*how can we come and see you?*' and the idea took off from there."

Opening a clinic where women feel listened to, and receive current and individualised treatment was important to both Heidi and Vicky, and all women aged over 16 are welcome at VHK due to the wide and varying nature of women's health.

"I really value the ability to offer women treatment options where they may be feeling very vulnerable and overwhelmed. It's hugely rewarding to see improvement to their symptoms and restoring their happiness and wellbeing."

Dr Vicky Hobbs

IS VHK FOR ME?

Women may experience different health concerns often related to hormonal changes at any point in their lives. These can vary from period problems, pelvic pain, vulval and vaginal problems, premenstrual syndrome, and the multiple complexities of navigating through the peri-menopause, menopause and post-menopausal transitions.

VHK are able to offer women a longer consultation time in order to fully understand and discuss their condition. A new patient appointment is 45 minutes (in comparison to around 10 minutes with a GP) during which time one of the doctors will discuss the symptoms their patients are facing, explore treatment options and create a bespoke management plan. This may include lifestyle support and the prescribing of all forms of Body Identical HRT and testosterone. Each patient receives a detailed post consultation report, and any prescribed medication can be delivered to their door within 48 hours.

The clinic treats all aspects of women's health, but some of the most common reasons why women choose to book an appointment include peri-menopausal and menopausal symptoms and changing heavy periods, for which VHK offer a Mirena coil fitting service.

Women who are on HRT and want to discuss their regime because of symptom resurgence, or side effects can also be helped by VHK. Heidi and Vicky can offer assessment and options for regime change or additional treatments for better control and side effect reduction. They also treat lots of women who are uncertain if their symptoms are related to peri-menopause and want to understand and discuss their changing bodies and how treatment can support this.

"As a busy mum and experienced doctor, I understand the issues women face in managing their health alongside the challenges of daily life."

Dr Heidi Kerr

VHK are available to provide safe, confidential and expert support and treatment for women across the area who may have concerns about their health.

Book your appointment with VHK Womens Health Clinic
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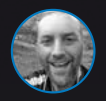
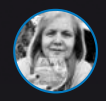
Meet the Team

When you become a client at PPM Financial Planning you do not just acquire an adviser, but a team of professionals who all know your story and have their own integral part to play in bringing it to life



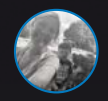
Martin Pryor
Financial Planner & Adviser

Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser in 1996 and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.



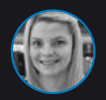
Nicky Lowndes
General Manager

Nicky has been at PPM Financial Planning since the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.



Laura Siddall
Financial Planner & Adviser

Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Her role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.

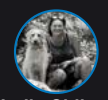


Laura Daniels
Mortgage Adviser

Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.

Louise Wheeler
Paraplanner

Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.



Jodie Chilcott
Office Administrator

Jodie joined PPM from an accountancy background and performs a variety of tasks in the day to day running of the business.

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INFLATION'S PRICE

Martin Pryor explains what the rising cost of retirement means for you and your savings.

Source: PLSA January 2023.

HOW much income do you actually need in retirement?

New research shows an increase that might surprise you. In 2019, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) published research examining how much three different levels of retirement living standards would cost for couples and those living on their own.

The three standards were summarised as:

- **Minimum:** Covers all your needs, with some left over for fun;
- **Moderate:** More financial security and flexibility;
- **Comfortable:** More financial freedom and some luxuries.

To get a sense of the difference across these living standards, the transport category provides a useful benchmark.

For a couple, the minimum level assumes no car, the moderate level has one three-year-old car replaced every ten years, while the comfortable pair have two cars, each replaced every five years.

The trio of living standards is updated for changes in spending patterns and the revised costs calculated by Loughborough University.

The latest results for people living outside London were published in January, based on April 2022 prices. They showed a sharp rise in the income needed at all three levels, as the graph (above, right) indicates.

Not all of the rise was due to inflation, which was 9.0% on a CPI basis in April 2022.

Some of the higher income requirement was due to revision to the mix of spending that "saw the amount of food included within the budget increasing to bring it into line with the up-to-date nutritional research on a healthy diet".

The disproportionate rise to the minimum figures (18% for singles and 19% for couples) also reflected where spending was concentrated. At the minimum level, 34% was applied to two categories with fast-rising inflation – food and fuel.

Inflation in 2022 has been such that the retirement living standard income levels would need another 5.3% added to them, just to bring them into line the CPI increase from April 2022 to January 2023.

State pensions will rise by 10.1% in April 2023, taking the new state pension up to £203.85 a week (£10,600 a year), which will help counter rising retirement costs, but a better comparison is the increase in state pensions in April 2022 – just 3.1%.

This is of course a general study. At PPM Financial Planning we respect that every individual and couple have their own unique lifestyle costs.

We have clients living like Kings and Queens on £20,000 (the minimum as suggested in the study) whereas we will have other clients that will baulk at the notion that you could retire comfortably on £54,500.

This is why lifestyle financial planning incorporating cash flow modelling is so important. It enables you to understand your numbers.

If you feel that your future retirement income is not on track to deliver your chosen standard of living, then the sooner you review matters, the better.

Give us a call and we can explain the next steps . . .

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

For more information, please contact us

Tel: 07961 162818
martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com
www.ppmfinancialplanning.com

Tax treatment varies according to individual circumstances and is subject to change.

The value of your investment and any income from it can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

MORTGAGE ADVICE ON YOUR DOORSTEP

Mark Meads grows the team at Village Financial.

Mark Meads and his growing team Christine (centre)and Martine in Barnt Green are here to help as you navigate mortgages throughout your life.

WE are delighted to announce that we have increased our team of advisers, with Martine Pope coming on board as a qualified mortgage adviser. This grows the team alongside Mark and Christine as we start to see more clients looking for help with their mortgage needs.

It has never been more important to get the right advice for your mortgage needs. Whether that be for First Time Buyers, those looking to move home, or even clients looking to raise funds through Equity Release.

Interest rates are constantly changing, so now is a good time to review your current mortgage, especially if you are on a variable rate. We may also be able to secure a new rate now, if your current mortgage deal is maturing in the next six months.

We know that the mortgaging of a property is one of the biggest financial decisions you will make, that is why we have many conversations with potential clients to see how we may be able to help. We do not charge any fees unless we are able to complete a mortgage for you.

Once you are a client of Village Financial, you become a client for life, not only getting the best deal now, but we will regularly review your circumstances. In particular we will always endeavour to contact you in advance of your current mortgage deal maturing.

Using a broker to source your new mortgage saves a lot of time and hassle and we are able to research the best deal for you with the wide range of lenders that we deal with, we also ensure that this is based on your individual circumstances.

With the current housing market still moving swiftly, as a Mortgage Broker, we can source the most suitable mortgage to meet your personal financial needs and make the house buying process less stressful for you.

- We'll help you every step of your mortgage journey
- We'll liaise with your estate agent and law firm as needed
- We'll keep you updated as your mortgage process progresses
- We won't keep you in the dark – we'll phone you when we say we will

Whatever your home plans, it can be hugely helpful to discuss your financial options with a local mortgage expert.

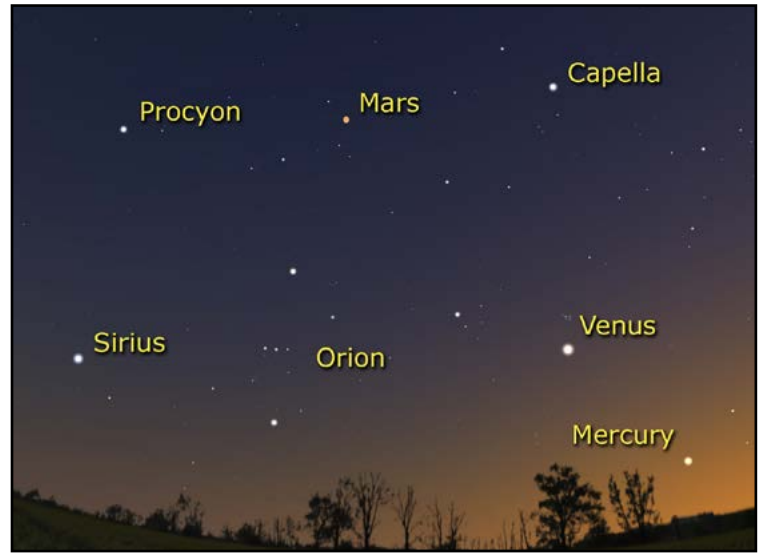
Let's arrange to have a chat about your plans and see how we can help.

Please call us on:
0121 445 1227.
Or contact via the website:
www.villagefinancial.co.uk

This firm usually charges a fee for mortgage advice. The amount of the fee will depend upon your needs and circumstances. This will be discussed and agreed with you at the earliest opportunity. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up payments on your mortgage. An Equity Release product will reduce the value of your estate, will not be suitable for everyone and may affect your entitlement to state benefits. To understand the features and risks please ask for a personalised illustration. Village Financial Solutions Ltd is an appointed representative of PRIMIS Mortgage Network. PRIMIS Mortgage Network is a trading style of Personal Touch Financial Services Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Evening Star watch

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.



Lighter evenings: Take this opportunity to map out the sky. *Pictures courtesy of NASA.*

APRIL and the evenings are getting lighter, enhanced by the switch to British Summer Time. Sunset at the start of the month is around 7.45pm so start looking 15 minutes later and over in the west is Venus, that bright planet once commonly known as the "Evening Star", a name also given to a famous steam locomotive.

It really is obvious even in the glow of sunset because it is so very bright (the planet that is, not the loco). This is because it is covered in a dense cloud layer that reflects nearly all of it's sunlight.

Standing on the surface, the Sun would appear as a dim red glow in the sky, a bit like we had here a few years ago when our atmosphere was full of sand from the Sahara.

You would get plenty of time to observe this too, as a day on Venus is equal to 243 earth days. This is slightly longer than a year which is 225 Earth days long, due to the fact that Venus rotates very slowly backwards so the Sun rises (very slowly) in the west and sets (ditto) in the east.

A very odd place and the hottest planet in the Solar System, even hotter than Mercury despite it being closer to the Sun.

This tiny planet, barely larger than our Moon, is visible for the first half of the month, too. Being so close to the Sun it is always in the glow of the sunset so you will need a good view of the horizon.

Start looking as soon as there is a bit of darkness to the sky, say around 8.30pm, down from Venus at about 45degrees to the right. It may take some time to locate the tiny pinprick of light and it helps if you have binoculars but I think it's worth it because very few people have ever seen Mercury.

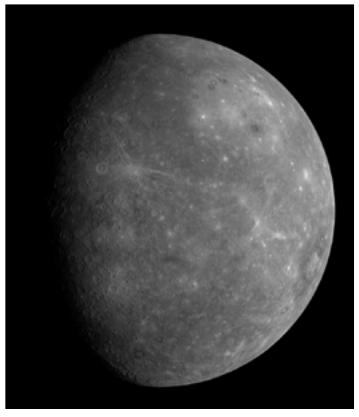
NASA's Messenger probe orbited it for four years from 2011 gathering lots of information about this sun-dried world.

The brighter stars start to appear as we edge towards 9pm and the first to become noticeable will probably be Capella, high in the sky above Venus.

Over to the left, slightly lower than Venus is Sirius. Although technically brighter than Capella, the haze and light pollution at that elevation reduces that advantage and this is the last chance to see this star, it will be gone next month.

Above Sirius, the next star to appear will be Procyon, the bright half of Canis Minor.

"Where is Mars?" I hear you ask. Well our villages (and the rest of the world) have now moved so far away from the red planet that it looks no brighter than an average star. It is located roughly half way between Capella and Procyon but its distinct orange hue makes it instantly recognisable.



Mercury: As seen by *Messenger*.

Like Jupiter, Mars will descend towards the horizon day by day and by the end of the month will be difficult to spot but Venus continues to climb higher, moving away from sunset's glow.

Look out for it on the 23rd when the Moon is very close by, always a very special sight.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

Making an impression

IN the course of your bird observation you may find yourself thinking, "I like the cut of that bird's jib". The jib of a sailing ship, the triangular one at the front, was a way for experienced sailors to identify far off vessels, and led to the phrase.

During the Second World War, enemy and friendly planes were distinguished by their G.I.S.S. – General Impression of Size and Shape – and in the 1920s the Cheshire ornithologist T.A. Coward referred to the identification of birds by their "Jis"' or "gis" being derived from the word "guise".

Whatever the etymology, it's another useful strategy for birders to identify what they are looking at. Just as when we catch sight of someone in the distance, too far away to hear their voice or make out their features, we are often very accurate in recognising their familiar gait and bearing. So it is with birds.

We have looked at plumage and sound in previous columns, sometimes one aspect is prominent, with others it can be a combination. Take the goldfinch on this month's cover, if seen, the five coloured plumage is unmistakable, if heard, to me, especially in a flock, they sound like wind chimes in the breeze. The behaviour aspect is not foremost in picking them out as I view or hear them. It may be different for you and that is part of the fun.

Let's look at some common birds and aspects of their behaviour and character which can help to pick them out from the crowd. Corvids, or the crow family, can just be a confusion of large black birds initially. If flocking they are probably not crows, which are more independent and not likely to be seen in large groups together when out and about. Jackdaws, however, will gather in huge corvid roosts – along with rooks and crows, in autumn and winter. When they take flight or are travelling from their feeding ground to the evening roost they resemble black rags scattered in the wind. If you look more closely you will see the group of birds is actually made up of numerous pairs that move quite clearly together. Like many corvids, jackdaw pairs bond for life and will separate from the group to breed.

A green woodpecker feeding on ants. Picture/*Dennis Brown*

Two birds of prey that can be tricky to separate are the kestrel and sparrowhawk. In flight, however, only the kestrel hovers (look up the poem *The Windhover)*, but the sparrowhawk moves with a clear flap, flap, glide. Simple.

While we're on raptors, hawks (eg buzzards) have finger-like feathers at the end of their wings, whereas falcons (eg hobby), have sharp pointed wings. So that's two broad groups easily divided.

Woodpeckers demonstrate a very direct rollercoaster flight with a "Tek, Tek" for the greater spotted. The much bigger green, known as a yaffle, will be laughing its head off while looking for ants.

In the summer, swallows, martins and swifts can be confusing. Before you get into differences in size, shape and plumage, it's worth knowing that usually swallows fly nearer the ground, swifts fly the highest and martins operate in the space between. All occupying their own niche.

If you see a small bird scuttling up a tree it's a treecreeper, if circling up but also down it's a nuthatch. We are unlikely to see a dipper dipping in our area, but a delicate bird in the park wagging it's tail continually will be a pied or grey wagtail.

It shouldn't be too difficult to pinpoint them from there. Plus we already know about dabblers and divers.

Whether it's shape, size, how they move or where they are, enjoy picking out each bird's particular essence and you'll soon have a "jib" repertoire to be proud of. See if you can pick out some of the migrant visitors which have arrived and are increasing week by week.

If you would like to take part in a group "bird walk" with me in* The Village *area, at whatever level of interest, please get in touch with the Editor by emailing:
editor@villageonline.co.uk
Happy birding.

JL

HOG HIGHWAY HEROES

Annette English, one of the founders of the Alvechurch Hedgehog Highway, tells *The Village* more about the group's plans for a huge hedgehog network and how you can help.

THE Alvechurch Hedgehog Highway was set up by a band of willing helpers following an article I read about a Hedgehog Highway started by residents in Kirtlington, Oxfordshire.

The aim was to help hedgehogs wander from garden to garden without having to cross the road encountering the very real risk of being run over, particularly as hedgehogs generally wander when it is dark, making it difficult for drivers to see them.

Research has shown that hedgehogs can roam over a surprisingly large area for such a small creature – their home ranges are approximately 10 to 20 hectares in size (that's a similar area to 14 to 28 football pitches).

A single hedgehog roams about 2km a night, while male hedgehogs may roam about 3km a night in the breeding season! This can put them in a lot of danger in an environment where there are cars and, sadly, hedgehogs are now classified as an endangered species. It is estimated that rural populations have halved since the millennium and urban ones by a third. It is a sad fact but there are ways we can help. . .

Most importantly we need to make our gardens hedgehog friendly so they can roam to find food or a mate.

Impenetrable fencing or solid walls makes it difficult for a hedgehog to wander; putting in holes that hedgehogs can pass through will really help. Holes about 13cm x 13cm (about the size of a CD) are a great size for a hedgehog to pass through so the more people who do this, the better it will be for the hedgehogs in our villages.

We need you: Can you help with the Hedgehog Highway? Picture/*BHPS*

You may have read our first article about the Hedgehog Highway in *The Village* magazine or spoken to the Alvechurch Hedgehog Highway team; Jan Brice, Dave Perryman, Sharon Baker (of Array4Hogs at the Maypole), Jayne (of Willows Hedgehog Rescue in Bromsgrove) and me, at our stall at Picnic in the Park and I am pleased to say that our Hedgehog Highway has really grown across the parish.

Recently we had some great news. . . we won the *Community Hedgehog Heroes* category in Britain's Biggest Hedgehog Street competition that was jointly run by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES).

Make way: Create your own hedgehog highway hole. Picture/*Pam Francis*

We all feel very proud but next year we are aiming at winning the overall category of the *Biggest Hedgehog Street in Britain*! So . . . can you help?

If you'd like to get involved, please try to make your garden hedgehog-friendly and join our Alvechurch Hedgehog Highway Facebook group, or take a look at our page on the Cleaner Greener Alvechurch website.

■ **For more information, on how to help Hedgehogs go to: Hedgehog Street www.hedgehogstreet.org Let's see if we can create the biggest Hedgehog Highway in Britain!**

SPRING CHILL SURPRISE

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

AS we last reported, February was another very dry month, particularly in the first few weeks, where only 1.8mm of rain fell up to the 20th February.

Over the whole of February, only 11.5mm rain was recorded, which is only 22% of the average local rainfall, giving us a much drier month than we would expect for the time of year.

A very sunny month this year, February recorded 105.5 hours of the local average sunshine, making up 141% of the average, which might have brightened spirits in what many consider to be quite a dreary month. The reason for these levels of sunshine was a high pressure area to the west of the UK, blocking the rain bearing systems affecting the UK, providing us with a very mild month.

All change for the first half of March, however. The high pressure area which blocked rainfall in February moved, allowing a very cold north or north-easterly airstream.

The cold winds brought periods of sleet, snow and showers. This caused icy conditions and very cold nights. The snow we received on the 9th and 10th March gave 10-11cm of snow; the most we have had since 2017, and brought with it some school closures and challenging road conditions.

The Outlook

AS WE head into April, there are signs of more settled, drier conditions being established across most of the UK.

Temperatures are expected to be cooler than average, with the greatest chance of significant rainfall and milder conditions in the South of the UK.

Above: The snowy view towards Rowney Green in March.

The snow begins to clear in Alvechurch on the hills by The Crown inn.

Winter 2022-23

Mean Max	8.2C	0.8C above average
Mean Min	1.9C	1.9C above average
Mean	5.0C	5.0C above average
Rainfall	142.6mm	68% of average
Sunshine	240.2hrs	124% of average

Any wintry hazards, like those we experienced in March are likely to be short-lived, given the time of year.

By mid-April, temperatures are expected to trend closer to average, hopefully giving us the warmer conditions we are all hoping for after a chilly start to spring.

February 2023

Mean Max	9.8C	2.0C above average
Mean Min	3.0C	1.3C above average
Mean	6.4C	1.7C above average
Rainfall	11.5mm	22% of average
Sunshine	105.5hrs	141% of average

March 2023 (to the 15th)

Mean Max	6.6C	3.8C below average
Mean Min	1.6C	1.2C below average
Mean	5.2C	2.5C below average
Rainfall	57.8mm	107% of average
Sunshine	37.4hrs	34% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

Attendees of a Biodiversity walk, standing between a flowering double hedge on the right and a flailed hedge on the left.

LET THE BLOSSOM COME

WE'VE had a relatively mild winter and early spring without extreme weather. But most plants are not early coming into leaf and flower, so the insects, mammals and birds which depend on them will be delayed in their activities too.

A possible reason is the summer drought followed by an exceptionally mild autumn, so lots of plants regrew in November. It all died back into the roots late, and leaves fell late, so that's perhaps why they are starting late this year. Except of course for the odd flowers of garlic mustard and cow parsley which I've seen flowering in February because they never died down! March is starting cold, so things will be held back even more.

Mary Green leads us north of Alvechurch towards Hopwood to explore what's on our doorsteps.

This month I am walking along Old Birmingham Road and Pestilence Lane from Alvechurch. It's a nice walk from Hopwood, too, and one I included in my biodiversity walks last spring. As you walk

continues overleaf

continues from previous page

out from Alvechurch centre, the main Birmingham Road is interesting. There are old oak trees surviving alongside the school, as on many of the entry roads into the village. The verges carry a good diversity of wild plants but are usually too much mown to see.

During lockdown they were profuse. There are non-native daffodils planted here which don't really contribute much to biodiversity (they don't carry much nectar) but do at least delay the mowing so the early spring native plants can flower! I understand that the district council is at last considering reducing the mowing of verges in Alvechurch, so others may reappear.

On the other side it's worth walking down the service road where the houses have patches of grass opposite. Some residents have started letting the grass grow in spring and reintroducing native wildflowers and fruit trees. It will have started to look good in April (look out for fritillaries) and gets even better in the summer (moon daisies!). What was a bit of a green desert with occasional cars parked on it is now home to insects and birds.

Old Birmingham Road takes off on the right from Roberts Corner roundabout. There are good trees here: a willow on this side which will be in leaf and flower by now, and a range of larger trees on the far side.

The start of Old Birmingham Road is unprepossessing with frequently cut verges and hedges, so little wildlife. However, opposite Casa Millennium there are two fine old trees, an oak and an ash, where you can look this month to see which comes into leaf first – usually the oak.

Ironically, the first small piece of good hedge, left to grow to its full height and blossoming beautifully, is in front of a recently established garage on the left. The next stretch, agricultural land, has hedges which are heavily flailed. This year they were cut especially late just before the 1 March deadline, when the hawthorn was already coming into leaf and blackthorn had flower buds.

The verges are good after the first

Wild garlic: an ancient woodland plant found in Alvechurch.

Spot in April: Fritillaries along Birmingham Road.

Bluebells: At home in ancient woodland around Alvechurch.

stretch. There are some beautiful old trees remaining, mostly oak, and the verges show signs of ancient woodland.

In April the bluebells will be coming, along with stitchwort and campion making the familiar red, white and blue of this time of year. You'll also see ground ivy and cuckoo pint. Varied flower colour is a good rough indication that plants will appeal to different insects.

On the right hand verge is lots of wild garlic or ramsons, with its broad edible leaves and starry white flowers. This too is an ancient woodland plant, like bluebells, but grows in damper places.

On the right here is a big pond and a footpath back to Old Rectory Lane. (The footpath used to be terribly muddy but has recently been drained and surfaced, so it is a delight to walk along by the river with more bluebells and wild garlic, if you want a different way back to the village.) Then the road crosses the river Arrow, with more wild garlic and some wild cherry blossom. This patch is varied and has a wealth of plants, insects and birds. Wild cherry is a good source of nectar in April and fruit in July, loved by blackbirds.

A little further on the right is a particularly interesting verge with two unusual plants, both flowering in April. One is goldilocks buttercup. This is an ancient plant of old turf especially woodland-edge. It grows in the Meadows and St Laurence churchyard too. It's much earlier than other buttercups. It has feathery leaves and almost always has imperfect flowers with fewer than five petals. It grows here among the more common celandines, yellow and starry, so you have to really look for it! It used to be common but is increasingly rare now and marks biodiverse ancient turf with all its carbon storage and insect hosting possibilities.

Next comes a flower called few-flowered garlic, quite rare. It has much narrower leaves than ramsons garlic, and only one or two flowers per stem in a papery case. It grows in a damp place near the ditch. It's another reminder of our lost diversity. More common flowers here include plentiful cow parsley which will be succeeded later by meadow sweet and hogweed. The more varied the flowers, the more insects and birds will be hosted. On this stretch last year we heard skylarks, showing there is arable land nearby. Listen out!

Nearing the end of Old Birmingham Road before it turns into Pestilence Lane, the hedge on the left improves greatly. It is tall and allowed to grow. In April it is full of white blackthorn blossom, and soon pink wilding apple blossom. Later there is hawthorn blossom.

Pestilence Lane was an old through-road cut off by the motorway. It's thought to be where there were plague graves, though no one is quite sure where. The remaining road stretch here has huge contrasts. Past the cottages, on the left, is a lovely old double hedge. It is only lightly cut so flowers and fruits very profusely. It will be full of blackthorn blossom in April and sloes in autumn when there are also wonderful blackberries. When the blackthorn has finished flowering, there is plentiful may blossom. Double hedges are traditional round here and always a haven for wildlife.

On the other side of the road the hedge has been flailed quite short, as every year, and barren. There are little hints that it was once a laid hedge, and it has some woodland plants in places.

I know most farmers can't go back to manual management of

Blackthorn blossom: Spot white blossom on Old Birmingham Road, which blooms in April.

Cuckoo pint: Can be found alongside ground ivy in verges.

More rare: Few flowered garlic, identified by it's narrow leaves.

A variety of hedges: Discover a range of hedges in the Village, including this restored hedge which can be found near Hopwood.

continues overleaf

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hedges,which is the best way to keep them in shape but still flowering. However, it is not too hard (and cheaper!) to switch to a three-year cutting cycle: any bit of hedge is only cut at the top once every three years so some of it is aways able to blossom.

Most of our native trees flower on the previous year's growth, so won't flower after a winter cut, and some need two years growth if cut right back. They're different from herbal, non-woody growth, which mostly comes back to flower after a winter cut.

If you want a longer walk, the end of the surfaced road gives you alternatives of walking to the left up a nice green lane, crossing the main road and walking to Hopwood via Ash Lane or across the fields towards the Wast Hills. The continuation of Pestilence Lane as a green lane will take you to the Hopwood M42 roundabout where you can pick up a footpath back to Old Rectory Lane in Alvechurch.

Another interesting way of coming back is to turn off on the Old Birmingham Road/Pestilence Lane junction towards Hopwood via Jay's Crescent, then walk back down the "new" Birmingham Road.

Above: Flowering ground ivy.
Below: Goldilocks buttercups.

It's not so pleasant in one way because of the heavy traffic. On this side the hedge is horribly flailed too. But if you walk down the far side there is a good path and a rather nice transformation.

The hedge along here used to be cut very severely – you can see the marks. But for the last couple of years it has been allowed to grow out on top and has started to flower and fruit again. There's a lovely variety of native trees here, some in leaf and blossom in April.

Behind it is the big new wood from Mayfield Farm. This is about 15 years old and well grown. It's not planted the way woodland is planted now, being too much the same kind of tree in straight rows.

The Woodland Trust and others would now recommend mixed planting of large and small trees in more natural pockets with herbal growth around. However, it's better than no wood and hosts a lot of birds including cuckoos and warblers in spring, and a few years ago a rare great grey shrike.

Walking past flowering hedges and leafing trees like this is uplifting at this time of year, and very different from walking past flailed hedges and mown verges, which I find frustrating as they are such a waste of natural resources.

As well as not hosting insects and birds, these chopped-off trees will not put down proper roots and can't help us with climate change – in fact the energy used to cut them means they will do the opposite. Whereas the full-grown hedges on the other side will capture carbon, trap pollution, and host all those lovely insects and birds.

■ **I wrote the poem below about the same time as the article. Poetry makes the forgotten unforgotten.**

March the first

Daffodils are the true flower of today
Yellow and bold under the ancient trees
Or snaking down the beck among the willows
Which soften into kitten-fur and pollen.
They're treacherous though, like the season
Which will swing from sun to snow, blossom
To frost as the whim takes it.
They carry poison, and there are stories
Of people eating them for onions and dying.
Poison means healing drugs though, and these bulbs
May kill cancers as blithely as the trumpets dance.
They look like manna for the early bees
But are not high in nectar, and survive
Even if the insects do not come. Bulbs do it
In secret underground, divide and rule.
Today's the tick-box day for nesting birds
No public cutting of hedges and trees
The willows didn't read the calendar though
And this one flowered a few days early. Its pollen
Would soon be humming with those bees. A man
With a chainsaw ripped through it and piled it
All present and correct before the cut-off cut-off day.
It will grow back. Willows do. They bend in the wind
But one year's flower has gone. A little loss
Forgotten in the trumpeting of spring.

Tree climbing: Helps to bring children into close contact with nature while developing fitness, coordination and muscle strength.

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF NATURAL CURIOSITY

MANY people might agree with the notion that these days too many children see the world through computer or television screens and are trapped in an over-cautious culture which tries to wrap children in cotton wool.

This time indoors deprives children of these first-hand experiences in the outdoors and restricts a deeper connection with nature, which can benefit us all in the long run.

If children don't know of and appreciate the natural world, then they are less likely to care about it. The "forest school" concept helps to build profound, positive relationships with the world through discovery, exploration, learning and enjoyable experiences which

Sian Cain, of **Forest Families**, tells *The Village* about the importance of building a positive relationship with the natural world, and how forest school encourages youngsters to develop a connection with nature from an early age, through gardening, play and learning.

continues overleaf

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lead to long-term pro-environmental attitudes and the desire to protect it.

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL & HOW DOES IT BENEFIT CHILDREN?

Forest school's roots reach back to the open-air culture "Friluftsliv" or, "free air life", seen as a way of life in Scandinavia. It first arrived in the UK in 1993 and has grown in popularity ever since.

Forest school is a child-centred inspirational learning process that offers opportunities for holistic growth in a safe, non-judgmental and nurturing environment. These are regular sessions, throughout the seasons, in a natural environment; ideally somewhere with trees.

Children learn to identify and name the flora and fauna, as well as the biodiversity within a woodland. They learn how to use natural and sustainable resources to play and create items that they are proud of, gathering new skills and using tools to empower them along the way.

BUILDING A CONNECTION WITH NATURE FROM YOUR GARDEN.

Forest school can ignite a connection with nature and a passion for conservation by spending time in gardens or local parks.

Giving children jobs to help with gardening can be fun and a responsibility that they will welcome!

Forest school teaches and encourages children to identify and name items that we see in the wild and teaching children fun facts to get them engaged.

If you are looking for ways to engage your children in gardening, try looking up interesting facts online, like "25 cool things about bugs!" www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/animals/insects/15-facts-about-bugs

Did *you* know that caterpillars have 12 eyes?

At Forest Families, we use the popular computer game, *Minecraft*, as a way of engaging older children, as there are lots of links to nature within this creative game:

"Would you like to learn how to use a real flint and steel to light a fire?",

"Would you like to make a working bow and arrow?"

Caring for our planet has never been more important. We all are aware of this but can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem.

Each of us can take small steps by working with our children to garden, create natural habitats and care for our local wildlife. Getting children outside, experiencing the seasons and wonders of nature enhances their wellbeing and creates a new generation, ready to work together to improve the environment for people and animals.

It all starts by putting on the right clothes for the weather and getting outside for some fun.

continues overleaf

Using tools: Teaches children to safely manage risk.

Den building: A great way to relax, feel safe and connect with nature.

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FOREST FAMILIES

I am a qualified forest school practitioner and paediatric first aider who had seven years experience of running forest school at a local school, before starting up "Forest Families" in 2020.

We now have a growing team of qualified forest school practitioners, teachers and carers and run sessions from various locations including Peck Wood in Rowney Green, Blackwell Adventure and Woodgate Valley Country Park.

We run birthday parties, holiday clubs, special educational needs (SEN) sessions, home educator sessions, family seasonal sessions, regular school sessions and "pop up" forest school sessions at various other locations around the county.

We can also provide "camp fire sessions" at any outdoor event with delicious "s'more" making!

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.

At Forest Families we run regular sessions for children with additional needs or challenging behaviour.

SEN children respond well because of the multi-sensory and enabling environment, where they can explore and take supported risks, gaining independence, reducing anxiety and creating a sense of belonging. We are always blown away by the impact that forest school has on the children and their families.

After a few sessions the children feel safe, engaged and build positive relationships with nature and each other; it also provides a good opportunity for parents to meet and relax.

PLANTING TREES is one of the best ways we can teach children about helping the environment. It gives an opportunity to talk about just how important trees are to us all.
The Woodlands Trust is giving away hundreds of thousands of trees to schools & communities.
Learn more about this here:
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FOREST FAMILIES
Website: www.forestfam.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/ForestSchoolFamilies
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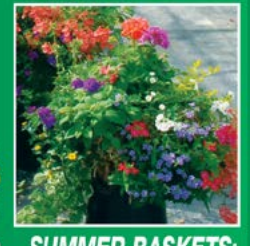
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THE HOUSMAN FAMILY STORY

THE 36th Bromsgrove annual lecture, hosted by the Bromsgrove Society, will celebrate "The Housman Family Story".

The evening presentation will take place on Wednesday 19th April at 7.30pm in Routh Concert Hall at Bromsgrove School, and will be live streamed.

The 36th Bromsgrove Lecture is held in conjunction with the Housman Society to celebrate their 50th Anniversary.

Local historian and Housman enthusiast Julian Hunt will present a lecture featuring the Housman family and their connections with Bromsgrove.

The Rev Robert Housman first came to the town in the 1790s to visit his brother-in-law, John Adams, manager of the worsted mill in Watt Close.

In the 1830s, Adams, then living at Perry Hall, helped his nephew, the Rev Thomas Housman, to become the first curate of Catshill. On Adams' death in 1858, the Rev Thomas' son, Edward Housman, moved into Perry Hall and soon became a leading figure in Bromsgrove and a popular speaker at Court Leet dinners.

Edward's eldest son, the poet Alfred Edward Housman, grew up at Perry Hall, as did his brothers and sisters, including Laurence and Clemence, whose major role in the campaign for women's suffrage is only now being fully appreciated.

Julian Hunt was born in Romsley, spent his career in research and has been a member of the Bromsgrove Society Executive Committee for many years.

Julian joined the staff of Birmingham Reference Library in 1968 and later worked as a local studies librarian in Oldham and Aylesbury. He has written several local history books and most recently co-authored *Bromsgrove, the Story of a Market Town* with Jenny Townshend.

A step back in time: Laurence and Clemence Housman, from 1911.

Julian's father, Joseph Hunt, founded the Housman Society with John Pugh in 1973, passing on his interest in the Housman family to his son. Julian is currently Editor of the *Housman Society Journal*.

Tickets to attend are £7.50 to include a drink after the presentation, or £5.00 for a live stream link, available online from www.bromsgrove-school.co.uk/boxoffice.

Tickets are also available from Foto Factory, 123 High Street, Bromsgrove (cash only please). The Society Book Stall will be open at the event (cash sales preferred).

Further details are on the Bromsgrove Society's website: www.bsoc.co.uk and social media @BromsgroveSoc.

Millicent Fawcett: British Suffragist. Laurence Housman's photograph is featured on the plinth.
Image taken by Jo Slade

Villagers put on a show

ALVECHURCH Dramatic Society's latest production is *When We Are Married*, by J.B. Priestley. When three well-to-do couples who were married at the same time meet to celebrate their silver wedding anniversaries, and to bring the local chapel organist down a peg or two, things don't go entirely to plan.

Instead, the tables are turned with the revelation that, since the Parson at their weddings 25 years beforehand was not properly qualified, they are not actually married at all!

Comic complications ensue as the cosy, smug lives of the couples are punctured, and some of those involved seek to take advantage of their new found singledom.

Throw in a secret romance, a drunken photographer, uppity servants and an amorous barmaid, and you've got a recipe for mayhem!

The group has updated the setting of the play from the Edwardian era to the 1950s and invite villagers to see whether their couples can ride out the rock and roll to a happy ending!

The play will run from Thursday 27 April to Saturday 29 April at 7:30pm in Alvechurch Village Hall.

Tickets are £8; £7 concessions, and are available from The Lounge, Alvechurch.

You can also buy them by phoning or texting 07977 140088 or emailing: ads.alvechurch@gmail.com

ROWNEY GREEN Players introduce their upcoming show, called *Hello… Is There Any Body There?*, an outrageous comedy by Ian Hornby.

All is dull and peaceful at Squire Grange, until the hapless Vic Tim arrives and is promptly dispatched by an unknown assailant. Everyone tries hard to uncover the murderer before he or she can strike again and to get rid of the body (because he has to come back in Act 2 as a policeman!).

Eventually Miss Marbles arrives to reveal the culprit . . . this hilarious comedy refuses to take itself (or anything else) seriously. A fun evening to be had by all . . . except perhaps Vic Tim!

Taking place at Rowney Green Village Hall at 7.30pm on Thursday 20 to Saturday 22 April. Tickets are £7.50 or £5 for under 25s, and are available from Sue Walker 0121 445 1562 or 07977254519.

Village What's On

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA is presenting AN EVENING OF JAZZ in the Ark, Alvechurch at 7.30pm on 20 May. A relaxed informal evening with 'SAUCE CITY JAZZ', a traditional 'Dixieland' jazz band. Tickets are £10 and available online at midlandsinfonia.co.uk or from Gin & Pickles or The Lounge, in The Square, Alvechurch (on the door if available card/cash). Doors and bar open at 7pm. www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy and jazz nights. The next event will be JG Jazz & Swing (John Beckingham) on 26 April. Jazz nights occur on the 4th Wednesday of the month, upcoming events include Sweet and Hot with Jeff & Anne Barnhart, "Spats" Langham & Graham Smith, on 24 May. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA, conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Spring Concert on Sunday 2 April at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR. The interesting programme includes: Haydn – Symphony No.44 in E minor 'Mournful', R. Strauss – Horn Concerto No.2 with Soloist Claire Burnell and Weill arr. Armstrong – Postcards from Berlin (after The Threepenny Opera). Go along to support and bring your friends. Admission is free; donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated.

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY perform Brahms "Requiem" at 3pm on Saturday 25 March at North Bromsgrove High School, see p.44 for more details.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30 with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not.
For more information or to join or book them, see their website: www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk.
They break for Easter so their next meetings are 17 April in the Village Hall and 24 April at the Crown Inn. On 30 April they are singing at St Richards festival in Droitwich.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA
Save the date of their Summer concert which will be on Sunday 25 June.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

TURNING OUT NICELY

ON the 6th April BURCOT WOODTURNERS will be celebrating their 25th anniversary, and marking the milestone at their monthly meeting which is taking place at Burcot Village Hall.

Anyone with an interest in woodturning is welcome to attend and join the club, whose membership is growing every month.

Woodturning is a craft which can be traced back thousands of years. Skilled craftsmen would create tools, utensils, furniture and many more tools that we use in every day life, now woodturning is mainly a leisure activity. Burcot Woodturners Club is one of the groups keeping the skill alive today.

The club's 25th anniversary event will start at 7.15pm, and visitors will have the opportunity to watch woodturning demonstrations, which will see both the club's modern powered lathe and their pole lathe being used. They will also have members' work and photographs covering the club's history on display.

Members of the AWGB (Association of Woodturners of Great Britain) committee and the West Midlands Rep will also be attending the event, along with members of the local community.

For those interested in becoming members, the event is an excellent opportunity to find out more about woodturning and meet fellow members.

Club meetings usually include a mix of professional demonstrations and "hands on" evenings. It is also an opportunity for members to come together, have a hot drink, a biscuit and chat about all things turning.

Follow their social media for more: Instagram: @burcotwoodturners Facebook: www.facebook.co.uk/burcotturners

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurch-frenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day.
No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House on Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. Covid has meant that creating friendships and making social contacts has become more important to all of us, and the Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.
Barnt Green Quakers would like to invite you to a slide show about William Blake – Artist, Poet and Philosopher, a talk with slides on the big screen by Annie Howard on Saturday 8 April at 2.30pm
A series of film showings will be held at the Friends Meeting house this year, the next of which will be on 8 April at 6pm. MGM Easter Special; a tale of the Christ that features the most spectacular chariot race in film history. "The entertainment experience of a lifetime." It won an unprecedented 11 Academy Awards.
There will be another film showing on 21 April at 7pm; "S—-" surpasses the barriers of cinema, becoming a healing media from which people can take away so much. It works seamlessly as a reflection on life, and

continues overleaf

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as a motivation to truly live every single moment of it. First theatrical screening outside of London. £5 admission.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall. Entry is £1 for members and £2 for guests, including a drink and biscuit.
On Wednesday 19 April at 7.30pm Robin May will be giving a talk: "Fascinating Futures: (Mis) Adventures with Microbes and Food". For more and full details, visit www.alvechurchvs.org or contact Chairperson Chris Miall via R.C.Miall@bham.ac.uk
A canal trip to Hopwood on back has been organised for 20 May, times to be advised, from 10am onwards. The event will be ticketed, so please contact AVS for more information.
AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves.
They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

FAMILY LITTER PICK

On Sunday 16 April Alvechurch Village Society will be holding a litter picklng family session at 10am.

Meet in The Square, outside The Lounge.

For more and full details, visit www.alvechurchvs.org

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community.
If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects.
The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre.
If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

MIDLAND Ancestors have resumed monthly meetings at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab.
The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 3rd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker.
They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity.
Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits. The next meeting will be "An Easter Parade!" on 13 Aoril. Info from Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment.
They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker.
Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com
The next walk will be "A Spring Walk in Alvechurch" led by Mary Green on 2 April at 2pm. Meet at The Crown, Withybed Lane, B48 7PN. Contact Mary on 0121 445 5957.
The following walk will be a walk around Inberrow & Abbott's Morton on 7 May at 2pm, led by Mariea & Martin Clarke, who you can contact on: 07752 918977. Meet at St Peters Church Car Park, Inkberrow, WR7 4EU.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks

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programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park.
Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.
Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm. Call Nikki for more information: 0778814817

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people. A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY.
We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request."
Their next meeting is 12 April. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome.

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Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

Community Meeting Room Hire Available

ENQUIRE TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION

BARNT GREEN QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
6 SANDHILLS ROAD
BARNT GREEN
B45 8NR

BARNTGREENMH@THEPRIORYROOMS.CO.UK

0121-236-2317

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm.
On Thursday 13 April they welcome Samantha Hopes and her topic is "Plants with a Story". Samantha initially trained and worked as a Geologist but after finding herself more interested in plants than rocks, she became a student at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, and Pershore College and then moved to RHS Garden Wisley, specialising in Rock and Alpine plants.
After additional training at Kew and Great Dixter, she graduated and went to work alongside John Massey as part of the team at Ashwoods Nurseries looking after his Hepatica collection. This became one of her passions, alongside specialist alpines and a new breeding program with Roscoeas. In 2016 Samantha began to work with her husband Nigel, who created their own nursery, Hopes Garden Plants at Halesowen.
Guests are always welcome £3.50 include coffee and biscuits. For more information please contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, are holding a coffee morning with Bring and Buy, on 10 April, between 10.30am - 1200pm. The next meeting will be at 7.30pm on Thursday 27 April in the Peace Hall, Rowney Green.
You don't have to be a flower arranger to enjoy the friendly company of our members, while watching beautiful flowers being transformed into an amazing arrangement. For more info contact Felicity on 07812 336263.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com.
You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community.
No previous experience is necessary and full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB).
More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH Cricket Club Pavilion is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

The deadline for What's On submissions for the May issue of *The Village* is 6 April 2023. Please email: info@villageonline.co.uk

Rambling in a circle

Book Review: A Midland Meander: A Circular Walk Around the West Midlands By *Brian J. Rance*

Rambler: Brian Rance (above) takes his readers on a 150-mile journey around his home patch (left) that turned out to be more epic than planned.

AS someone who has walked most of a long-distance path (the Pennine Way) in chunks over a number of years, the problem of getting to and from the start/finish point each time, as it gets further and further away, is familiar.

In fact, the prospect of somehow getting from Alvechurch to Bellingham in Northumberland to complete the final few days over the Cheviot Hills means I'll probably never get around to finishing it.

Birmingham rambler Brian Rance found a fairly neat solution to this problem: why not just circumnavigate your home town? You can drive out for day walks, using public transport or taxis to get back to your car, or for multi-day outings, take public transport there and back.

As this is his fifth book – after four escapades in the south-east of England – he had plenty of experience to draw on when planning the trip.

And so, off he set in October 2019 on his "Midland Meander", starting from The Red Lion pub in Alvechurch as the nearest point on the route from his home in Kings Heath, having parked up in the Tanyard Lane car park.

We soon learn that getting to pubs and sampling a pint of beer is a prime concern for Brian, a 73-year-old retired "built environment" academic; he even lists the 31 pubs he visits at the end of the book.

Somehow, he misses the award-winning Weighbridge Inn as he joins the canal towpath out of Alvechurch towards Bromsgrove, but no matter, he has got the Tardebigge pub in his sights after leaving the canal.

Unfortunately for him, it was closed for refurbishment when he arrived at its door – he'd have done better heading for The Cross at Finstall, which would have almost certainly have been open.

In the end, he gets a cab from the cafe at Tardebigge Court back to the Red Lion in Alvechurch and has a pint there before driving back to Kings Heath.

And so the story goes through October as Brian finds his way to Aston Fields and Bromsgrove and on to Kinver by the end of the month.

Along the way, he muses on many things, including whether he has trouble being served in cafes because his walking clothes make him look like a vagrant and up to no good.

He also offers interesting information, mainly historical and going back to the formation of the land as we now know it, such as: "The Midland plateau is composed of a layer of Mercia mudstone, formerly known as Keuper marl, overlaying Bunter sandstone laid down in desert conditions in the Triassic geological period when Birmingham was located in the tropics east of the present Caribbean Sea."

Who knew?

But after this promising start, his plans are scuppered by the Covid pandemic and he doesn't restart his meander until late July 2020, when he only manages the 20 miles from Kinver to Brewood during a year of lockdowns.

By late May 2021, Brian is, as he says, "double jabbed" and able to return to his endeavour, taking in Rawnsley, Lichfield, Tamworth and Meriden as he circumnavigates Birmingham, finally arriving back on *The Village* patch at Portway, described as a "disorganised hamlet".

He then enters "the Alvechurch bowl" above Rowney Green and walks down into the village, stopping off at what must be The Swan Inn for his first celebratory pint, before strolling "triumphantly through the heart of the village to The Red Lion", completing his circle around this part of the West Midlands.

As well as the full-size map of the walk shown at the top of this page, the book contains maps of each section of the walk for anyone who might want to follow in the author's footsteps and pictures of some of the highlights along the way.

The book is available at £14.95 from: www.bookguild.co.uk RP

Alvechurch FC in action and celebrating their thrilling victory against Aston Villa Under-21s. *Pictures*/Ian Macvie

Another cup thriller

ALVECHURCH FC produced another stunning result in a cup match to give a big boost to what has already been a memorable season.

The victory on penalties against Aston Villa Under-21s after the match finished 5-5 takes them into the semi final of the Birmingham Senior Cup and is more than small consolation for the fact a play-off place is now beyond reach in the league.

The excitement lit up a cold, damp night and the 782 supporters who braved the elements could not imagine how this game would unfold after Aston Villa took a two goal lead after just 20 minutes, *writes Trevor Ball.*

As half time approached, an Alvechurch free kick from just outside the penalty area beautifully struck by ever reliable Jed Abbey saw the ball beat the wall and nestle in the back of the net to end the first half 2-1 to Aston Villa

The second half saw an unbelievable seven goals scored. Charlie Lutz restored Villa's two-goal cushion with his second of the game, but with two goals in as many minutes from Jack Concannon and Tyrell Sheen Hamilton, the home side were on level terms in this end-to-end encounter.

Aston Villa took the lead yet again with Dylan Mitchell getting on the score sheet but Abbey equalised with a penalty after a foul on Tyrell Sheen Hamilton. With just two minutes to go, Alvechurch took the lead for the first time in the tie when Abbey scored his hat-trick goal, but there was still time for Aston Villa to equalise in injury time with Lutz scoring his third of the night.

The final whistle blew on this incredible game as the tie went straight to penalties, with manager Ian Long having substituted goalkeeper Harvey Randle for Dan Jezeph for the shootout.

The tie was finalised on the seventh penalty as Villa missed theirs and ex-Villa player Brad Burton ensured the victory and a semi-final place for the Alvechurch on what was an incredible night of football drama

The semi-finals line-up is still to be confirmed, definitely through are Alvechurch, Stourbridge and Coventry City and they will be joined by the winners of the tie between Redditch United and West Bromwich Albion.

Back in the league, after the fantastic FA cup run last autumn and adverse weather conditions, the club has seven fixtures in April, of which five are at home.

While there will be no league honours for the club this year, Alvechurch can still have a big say in how the league table looks at the end of the season.

The final two games are at home to potential league winners Coalville Town and the final game is away at play-off hopefuls Rushall Olympic, not forgetting the local derby on Easter Monday away at Redditch United.

With the club historically being strong at home there are plenty of opportunities to push for a top half finish plus influence the league title winners and playoff positions.

AFC FIXTURES

League matches unless stated.

APRIL

1st Ilkeston Town (h) 3.00
4th Mickleover (h) 7.45
8th Needham Market (h) 3.00
10th Redditch United (a) 3.00
15th Hitchin Town (h) 3.00
18th Coalville Town (h) 7.45
22nd Rushall Olympic (a) 3.00

Remi stays on

ALVECHURCH fans will be delighted that after a successful loan spell at the club, Remi Walker has had his loan spell extended by another 28 days from Birmingham City.

More good news for the club is the return from injury of Nick Clayton Phillips, who picked up a nasty injury in pre-season.

After working hard on his recuperation, Nick made a substitute appearance away at Stourbridge after seven months on the sidelines.

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